

Relationship with secular government is a problem for any religion and its leaders (and vice versa). Governments normally concentrate at least in part on issues of war and earthly justice, and perhaps some economic issues such as provisioning cities or helping the poor. What connection do these functions and the people responsible for them have with the purposes of life as defined by religion? What if a government does not attend properly to religion or even is hostile to it? Or, from a government standpoint, what if religious officials seem to be falling down on the job or interfering with obviously secular concerns? The Chinese government ultimately turned against Buddhism in the ninth century, because it felt it must protect the primacy of loyalties to the state. Issues of this sort were different from leading political ideals in the classical period, when except in India religion was less prominent. One change was clear: no Christian or Muslim ruler could claim he was god, unlike some Romans and as opposed to the Chinese Son of Heaven concept.

Early on Christian leaders had faced the issue of what to do about the state. As he tried to spread the new religion to a wide audience, Paul stressed the importance of obeying government authorities even though the chief interests of the good Christian centered on divine power (see chapter 6). As the Christian church developed in Western Europe, with officials and institutions independent of the state, questions of mutual relations became more pressing. The adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire, and then later by governments in Western Europe, complicated the issue still further: Christian political leaders thought they had a religious role to play (and might want to use religion to bolster their power); church leaders might welcome political support but would often fear secular control.

The rapid rise of Islam, following Muhammad's formulation of the religion early in the seventh century, raised broadly similar concerns. Here was another religion devoted to the power and glory of God; purely political purposes would pale by comparison. Yet, even more than Christianity, Islam developed a highly legalistic impulse. The Koran, which Muhammad presented as the word of Allah, contained a host of rules for family and business behavior. Further religious

codes developed, particularly in the Hadith. But if religion regulated so many aspects of human affairs, was there a separate place for government? The situation was further complicated by the fact that although Islam had religious officials—including scholars who interpreted Muslim law—there was no institutional church of the sort that developed in Western Europe, with a clear leadership hierarchy. And Muhammad, like Paul, had explicitly urged the faithful to obey even a bad ruler—religious people should not be distracted by political concerns.

The following passages present some of the Christian and Muslim views as they took shape in the postclassical period, and suggest on balance that they are different. The differences reflected variations in the two religions, but they also had huge implications concerning the power of the state—at the time and subsequently.

Questions

1. What were the main differences in the ways Christian and Muslim thinkers defined the state in its relationship to religion? What state functions would both religions agree on? How does the existence of a separate church differentiate the Christian from the Muslim approach?
2. Might Muslims disagree about the state's relation to religion in ways at all similar to the postclassical Christian debate? Did Islam impose any limits on a good ruler?
3. What would a Muslim think of the Christian debate about papal versus imperial power?
4. In the final analysis, are there major differences between Christian and Muslim definitions of a good ruler? Do the religions differ in their beliefs about what to do if a ruler is bad?

For Further Discussion

1. Why did both Christian and Muslim leaders urge obedience to the state in almost all circumstances?
2. Which approach, the Christian or the Muslim, would produce more responsible government?
3. Are differences between Christian and Muslim political traditions—complex as both traditions were—still visible in the world today? Do you agree that Christian ideas help explain a limited state concept in the West? What state concept most logically follows from Muslim ideals?

Nizam al-Mulk was a Persian bureaucrat who served sultans for the Seljuk Turks for thirty years during the eleventh century, at a time when the Seljuks controlled much of the Middle East (it was the Seljuks who a bit later opposed the Christians in the Crusades). This treatise in some ways resembles a host of works throughout history that were designed to please kings. King-pleaser treatises flattered rulers by telling them how to get and keep power and generally insisting on their importance to their people. But this was a Muslim statement, and religion is very much present in the kinds of responsibilities and restraints Nizam al-Mulk insists upon in the name of God. The document refers to the title *caliph*, taken by the prophet Muhammad's Arab successors, who claimed wide religious powers and duties. It frequently invokes the holy book the Quran (Koran).

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1. In every age and time God (be He exalted) chooses one member of the human race and, having adorned and endowed him with kingly virtues, entrusts him with the interests of the world and the well-being of His servants; He charges that person to close the doors of corruption, confusion and discord, and He imparts to him such dignity and majesty in the eyes and hearts of men, that under his just rule they may live their lives in constant security and ever wish for his reign to continue.

2. Whenever—Allah be our refuge!—there occurs any disobedience or disregard of divine laws on the part of His servants, or any failure in devotion and attention to the commands of The Truth (be He exalted), and He wishes to chasten them and make them taste the retribution for their deeds—may God not deal us such a fate, and keep us far from such a calamity!—verily the wrath of The Truth overtakes those people and He forsakes them for the vileness of their disobedience; anarchy rears its head in their midst, opposing swords are drawn, [and] blood is shed. . . .

3. Then by divine decree one human being acquires some prosperity and power, and according to his deserts The Truth bestows good fortune upon him and gives him wit and wisdom, wherewith he may employ his subordinates every one according to his merits and confer upon each a dignity and a station proportionate to his powers. He selects ministers and their functionaries from among the people, and giving a rank and post to each, he relies upon them for the efficient conduct of affairs spiritual and temporal. If his subjects tread the path of obedience and busy themselves with their tasks he will keep them untroubled by hardships, so that they may pass their time at ease in the shadow of his justice. If one of his officers or ministers commits any impropriety or oppression, he will only keep him at his post provided that he responds to correction, advice or punishment,

and wakes up from the sleep of negligence; if he fails to mend his ways, he will retain him no longer, but change him for someone who is deserving; and when his subjects are ungrateful for benefits and do not appreciate security and ease, but ponder treachery in their hearts, shewing unruliness and overstepping their bounds, he will admonish them for their misdeeds, and punish them in proportion to their crimes. Having done that he will cover their sins with the skirt of pardon and oblivion. Further he will bring to pass that which concerns the advance of civilization, such as constructing underground channels, digging main canals, building bridges across great waters, rehabilitating villages and farms, raising fortifications, building new towns, and erecting lofty buildings and magnificent dwellings; he will have inns built on the highways and schools for those who seek knowledge; for which things he will be renowned for ever; he will gather the fruit of his good works in the next world and blessings will be showered upon him. . . .

4. . . . [God] furnished [the King] with powers and merits such as had been lacking in the princes of the world before him, and endowed him with all that is needful for a king—such as a comely appearance, a kindly disposition, integrity, manliness, bravery, horsemanship, knowledge, [skill in] the use of various kinds of arms and accomplishment in several arts, pity and mercy upon the creatures of God, [strictness in] the performance of vows and promises, sound faith and true belief, devotion to the worship of God and the practice of such virtuous deeds as praying in the night, supererogatory fasting, respect for religious authorities, honouring devout and pious men, winning the society of men of learning and wisdom, giving regular alms, doing good to the poor, being kind to subordinates and servants, and relieving the people of oppressors. Following all this God gave him power and dominion as befitted his worthiness and good faith, and made all the world subject to him, causing his dignity and authority to reach all climes; all the dwellers on earth are his tributaries, and as long as they seek his favour they are protected by his sword. . . .

On Recognizing the Extent of God's Grace towards Kings

3. It has come down in a tradition from The Prophet (may Allah bless him and save him) that on the day of the resurrection, when anyone is brought forward who [in his life] wielded power and command over God's creatures, his hands will be bound; if he has been just, his justice will loose his hands and send him to paradise; but if he has been unjust, his injustice will cast him into hell as he is, with his hands bound in chains.

4. There is also a tradition that on resurrection day whoever had any command in this world over God's creatures, even over the inhabitants of his own house or over his own underlings, will be questioned about it; likewise the shepherd who tended his sheep will be required to answer for that too.

5. They say that at the time of his father's leaving this world [caliph] 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar ibn al Khattab (may Allah be pleased with them both) asked, 'O father, where and when shall I see you again?' 'Umar said, 'In the next world.' 'Abd Allah

said, 'I would it were sooner.' He said, 'You will see me in a dream tonight, tomorrow night, or the next night.' Twelve years passed by without his appearing in a dream. Then one night he saw him in a dream and said, 'O father, did you not say that within three nights I should see you?' He said, 'O son, I was occupied, because in the country around Baghdad a bridge had become dilapidated and officials had not attended to repairing it. One day a sheep's forefoot fell into a hole on that bridge and was broken. Till now I have been answering for that.'

6. Of a certainty The Master of the World (may Allah perpetuate his reign) should know that on that great day he will be asked to answer for all those of God's creatures who are under his command, and if he tries to transfer [his responsibility] to someone else he will not be listened to. Since this is so it behoves the king not to leave this important matter to anyone else, and not to disregard the state of God's creatures. To the best of his ability let him ever acquaint himself, secretly and openly, with their conditions; let him protect them from extortionate hands, and preserve them from cruel tyrants, so that the blessings resulting from those actions may come about in the time of his rule, if Allah wills. . . .

1. It is incumbent upon the king to enquire into religious matters, to be acquainted with the divine precepts and prohibitions and put them into practice, and to obey the commands of God (be He exalted); it is his duty to respect doctors of religion and pay their salaries out of the treasury, and he should honour pious and abstemious men. Furthermore it is fitting that once or twice a week he should invite religious elders to his presence and hear from them the commands of The Truth; he should listen to interpretations of the Quran and traditions of The Prophet (may Allah pray for him and give him peace); and he should hear stories about just kings and tales of the prophets (upon them be peace). During that time he should free his mind from worldly cares and give his ears and attention [wholly] to them. Let him bid them take sides and hold a debate, and let him ask questions about what he does not understand; when he has learnt the answers let him commit them to memory. After this has gone on for some time it will become a habit, and it will not be long before he has learnt and memorized most of the precepts of divine law, the meanings of the Quran and the traditions of The Prophet (upon him be peace). Then the way of prudence and rectitude in both spiritual and temporal affairs will be open to him; no heretic or innovator will be able to turn him from that path. His judgment will be strengthened and he will increase in justice and equity; vanity and heresy will vanish from his kingdom and great works will spring from his hands. The roots of wickedness, corruption and discord will be cut out in the time of his empire. The hand of the righteous shall become strong and the wicked shall be no more. In this world he shall have fame, and in the next world he shall find salvation, high degree and inestimable reward. In his age men will more than ever delight in gaining knowledge. . . .

3. The most important thing which a king needs is sound faith, because kingship and religion are like two brothers; whenever disturbance breaks out in the country

religion suffers too; heretics and evil-doers appear; and whenever religious affairs are in disorder, there is confusion in the country; evil-doers gain power and render the king impotent and despondent; heresy grows rife and rebels make themselves felt. . . .

The Story of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al 'Aziz and the Famine

10. They say that in the days of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al 'Aziz (Allah's mercy be upon him) there was a famine and the people were in distress. A party of Arabs approached him and complained saying, 'O Commander of the Faithful, we have consumed our own flesh and blood in the famine (that is, we have become thin), and our cheeks have turned yellow because we have not enough to eat. We need what is in your treasury; and as for that treasure, it belongs either to you or to God or to the servants of God. If it belongs to God's servants it is ours; if it belongs to God, He has no need of it; if it is yours, then [as the Quran 12. 88 says] "be charitable unto us, for Allah will requite the charitable" . . . ; and if it is ours let us have it that we may escape from these straits, for the skin is withered on our bodies.' 'Umar ibn 'Abd al 'Aziz was moved to sympathy for them, and tears came into his eyes; he said, 'I will do as you have said,' and in the same hour he gave orders for their requests to be attended to and their wants to be supplied. When they were about to get up and go, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al 'Aziz (Allah's mercy be upon him) said, 'O men where are you going? As you presented your case and that of the rest of God's servants to me, so do you present my case to God' (meaning: remember me in your prayers). Then those Arab tribesmen lifted their eyes to heaven and said, 'O Lord, by Thy glory [we pray] that Thou wilt do unto 'Umar ibn 'Abd al 'Aziz as he did unto Thy servants.'

11. When they had done praying, immediately a cloud came up and it began to rain heavily; a hailstone fell upon the bricks of 'Umar's palace; it broke in two and a piece of paper fell from inside it. They looked at it and there was written upon it [in Arabic], 'This is a grace from Allah The Mighty to 'Umar ibn 'Abd al 'Aziz [exempting him] from the fire.'

**A CHRISTIAN DEBATE: CANON LAWYERS IN THE
TWELFTH CENTURY**

The growth of state power, including the claims of the emperor of Germany, raised new church-state issues in Europe by the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A famous controversy in the eleventh century had pitted Pope Gregory VII against

From Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 122-26.

the emperor Henry IV over the issue of whether secular rulers had any right to appoint bishops. Gregory insisted on the supremacy of the church in religious matters and, by absolving Germans of religious obligations to obey their ruler, got the emperor to back down. The following debate, from the end of the twelfth century, is between two eminent jurists. Church (canon) law was becoming more elaborate, and the revival of Roman law provided different arguments about the state. In this debate Huguccio favors the emperor's side. Alanus uses interpretations of the Bible, including the idea that Christ conveyed his authority to Peter, who became the first pope, plus claims about the power Constantine gave the church, to support papal supremacy.

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HUGUCCIO: *After the coming of the Truth.* Up until the coming of Christ the imperial and pontifical rights were not separated, for the same man was emperor and pontiff. . . . But the offices and rights of the emperor and the pontiff were separated by Christ and some things, namely temporal affairs, were assigned to the emperor, others, namely spiritual affairs, to the pontiff, and this was done for the sake of preserving humility and avoiding pride. If the emperor or the pontiff held all offices he would easily grow proud but now since each needs the other and sees that he is not fully self-sufficient he is made humble. . . . Here it can clearly be gathered that each power, the apostolic and imperial, was instituted by God and that neither is derived from the other and that the emperor does not have the sword from the apostle. . . . All these contrary arguments seem to imply that the emperor receives the power of the sword and the imperial authority from the apostle and that the pope makes him emperor and can depose him. I believe however, that the emperor has the power of the sword and the imperial dignity from election by the princes and people, . . . for there was an emperor before there was a pope, an empire before a papacy. Again the words, "Behold, here are two swords" (Luke 22:38), were spoken to symbolize the fact that the two powers, namely the apostolic and imperial, are distinct and separate. If, therefore, it is anywhere stated or implied that the emperor has the power of the sword from the pope, I understand it as meaning the unction and confirmation which he has from the pope when he swears fidelity to him; for before this, although he is not called emperor, he is an emperor as regards dignity though not as regards unction, and before this he has the power of the sword and exercises it. When it is said that the pope can depose him I believe this to be true, but by the will and consent of the princes if he is convicted before them. Then I take it, in the last resort, if he has been convicted and admonished and will not desist or give satisfaction, he should be excommunicated and all should be removed from [loyalty] to him. . . . If still he is not corrected then finally he is justly smitten with a sentence and rightly expelled by armed force, and another legitimately elected. But by whom is the

sentence pronounced? By the lord pope before whom he was convicted or by his princes if the Roman pontiff has approved this.

ALANUS: This indeed is certain according to everyone, that the pope has jurisdiction over the emperor in spiritual matters so that he can bind and loose him . . . but, according to Huguccio, by no means in temporal matters though the pope can judge him in temporal matters and depose him by the wish of the princes who elect him according to customary law. According to Huguccio the emperor has the sword from God alone and not from the pope except as regards coronation and confirmation, and he has full imperial jurisdiction beforehand although he is not called emperor.

But in truth, and according to the Catholic faith, he is subject to the pope in spiritual matters and also receives his sword from him, for the right of both swords belongs to the pope. This is proved by the fact that the Lord had both swords on earth and used both as is mentioned here, and he established Peter as his vicar on earth and all Peter's successors. Therefore today Innocent has by right the material sword. If you deny this you are saying that Christ established a secular prince as his vicar in this regard. Again Peter said to the Lord, "Behold, here are two swords" (Luke 22:38), so the material sword too was with Peter. Again if the emperor was not subject to the pope in temporalities he could not sin against the church in temporalities. Again the church is one body and so it shall have only one head or it will be a monster.

This opinion is not invalidated by the fact that there were emperors before there were popes, because they were only *de facto* emperors, and none except those who believed in the true God had a right to the sword; nor do infidel rulers have it nowadays. Likewise it is not invalidated by the fact that Constantine conferred temporal jurisdiction on [pope] Sylvester. . . .

From his plenitude of right the pope could take away the City and other possessions even if the emperor was unwilling.

The emperor then has the sword from the pope. The electors indeed confer it on him, not the pope, but every bishop has his bishopric from the pope and yet the pope does not confer it but rather canonical election of the clergy does. The pope therefore is the ordinary judge of the emperor in both temporal and spiritual affairs and can depose him. . . . But can he depose him for any crime? I answer, rather for none, unless he is determined to persist in it, and even then perhaps not for any offence but only for those which harm the people, as for instance the continued discord of heresy. But could the pope keep the material sword for himself if he wished? I answer no, because the Lord divided the swords as is said here, and the church would be gravely disturbed by this. . . .